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ABSTRACT

A sports counseling scheme for young people on criminal probation in Hampshire (England) was developed in the 1980s as a partnership between the Sports Council and the Probation Service. The scheme aims to encourage offenders, aged 14 and up, to make constructive use of their leisure time; to allow participants the opportunity to have positive experiences and develop social skills; to make offenders aware of related educational, training, and employment opportunities; and to contribute to crime reduction programs. Elements of the scheme include individual and group activities, outdoor challenge, community participation, justice and equal opportunities, health and fitness, education and training, and preparation for future employment opportunities. Both cooperating agencies must consider the individual needs of participants, avoid stereotyping of individuals, take part in appropriate awareness training that explains individual needs and aspirations, and engage participants in program planning. Over the past 5 years, the Sports Council found that probation officers felt sports activities helped their clients by promoting self-esteem, self-awareness, confidence, friendships, and achievement, and by making individuals aware of resources available to them. This paper contains a chart of elements explaining Probation Service involvement in sports, and a list of general factors encouraging probation officers to refer clients to another agency. (SV)

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HAMPSHIRE PROBATION SPORTS COUNSELING SCHEME

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Hampshire Probation Sports Counselling Scheme

KEITH WALDMAN

Keith established, and for the last ten years has been the Project Development Manager for, Hampshire Probation Sports Counselling Scheme. He is also currently involved in co-ordinating three motor projects in Hampshire.

I have come to this conference almost directly from one held in Sheffield. Its title was "The Young Adult Offender - A New Approach". There were about 150 people attending - Probation Officers, Youth Justice Officers, Youth Workers, Magistrates and so on. There were about 20 workshops on topics ranging from Motor Projects, Theatre Groups, Victim Support Schemes, to Bail information. Now I mention all this because in the workshop group I was attending at this conference today, there were four or five probation services attending and I reflected that the previous conference I had been at would have been an ideal selling shop for the use of adventure activities with young people at risk. All probation areas in the country now have to give 5% of their total budgets to partnerships with other agencies so I would suggest to you all that this could be a possible source of funding for adventure based schemes in the future.

The Sports Counselling Scheme that I run is very much based on young people's local communities so if it appears to have tenuous links with adventure activities at outdoor centres you will have to forgive me. However, I am reminded by this conference that you don't need mountains around you to achieve the components of adventure - the group I attended last night came up with words like Challenge, Trust, Learning and Commitment.

The Sports Counselling Scheme has now been in operation for ten years so let me give a quick history of why it started.

In the mid 1980s the Sports Council decided to take positive action on their slogan "Sport for All". They created partnerships with other agencies previously untapped who may not have focussed upon activities before, to try to attract new individuals who had not been participating in sport. The partnerships they created were with agencies such as Women's Institutes, brewery, Working men's Clubs, Health Units, and so on.

So why did the Probation Service think of activities?

As you can see from Figure 1, and probably know, there are many different aspects to how activities can benefit, in particular, offenders with low self-esteem - individuals who have been failures for most of their lives - failures at school, failed with parents, failed to get a job and in fact we see them failed at crime. Activities are therefore a valuable tool for the Probation Officer to offer to the client because they are based outside the office setting which is most of the time irrelevant to young people.

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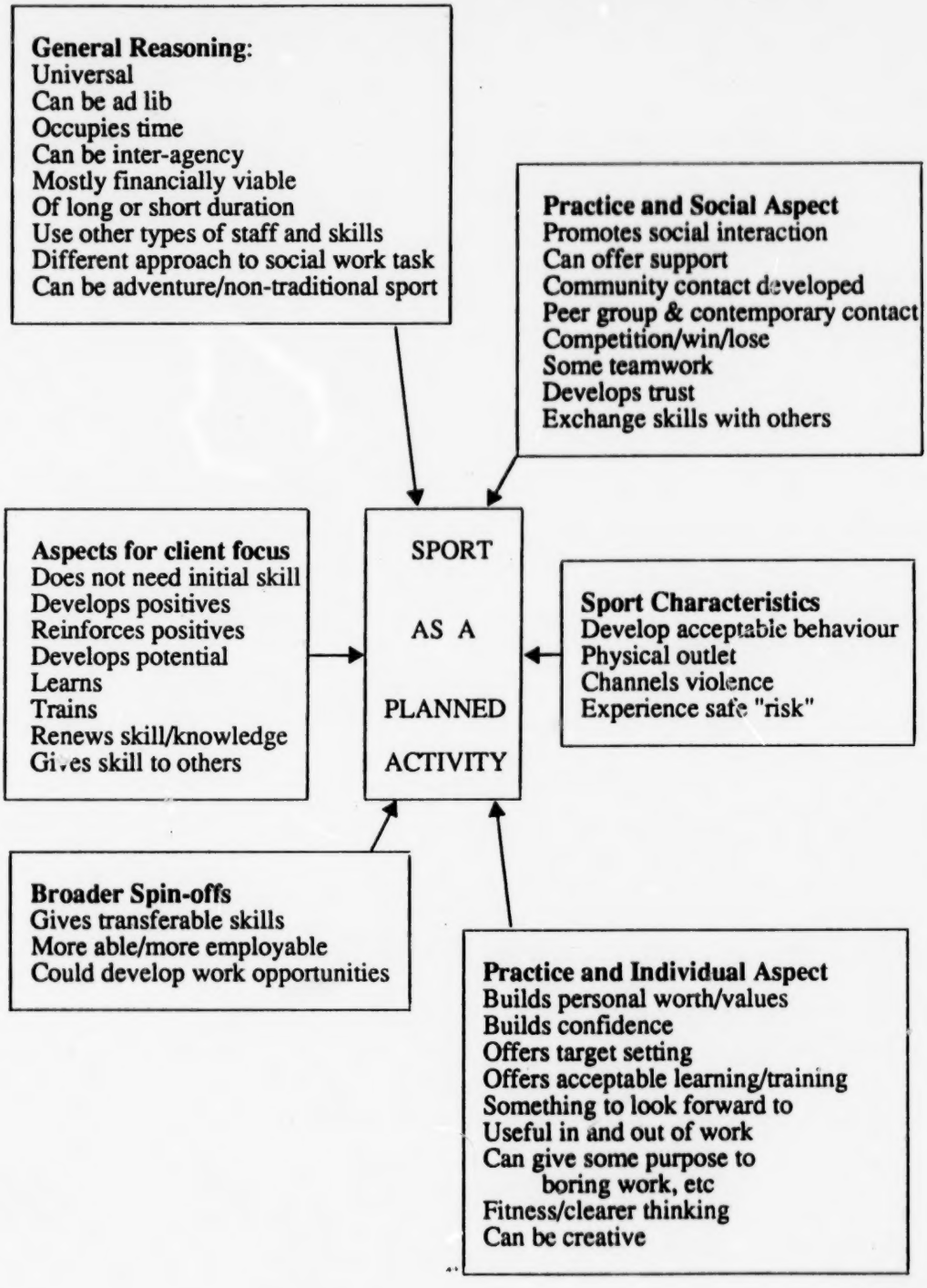
Fig 1.

WHY SPORT? WHY PROBATION SERVICE INVOLVEMENT?



What is the process of Sports Counselling?

The Sports Counselling Scheme aims to encourage and enable offenders aged 14 and upwards to make constructive use of their leisure time: in particular to participate in sporting and leisure activities with the emphasis on developing links for other participants within their local community. Now if we had as one of our aims that the individuals we work with join clubs we would be on to a loser. Sports Clubs tend to be about white middle class people who are employed, have the right equipment, can pay club fees and are reasonably good at the activity. The people we work with are most of the time none of these. Likewise the cost of sports - sports halls can be expensive, although there are examples in some parts of the country whereby the unemployed can make use of leisure centres free of charge or at little cost - these schemes have names such as Leisure Cards in Southampton or in Portsmouth, Passport to Pleasure.

So the aims of our Scheme are as follows:

1. To provide a programme of sport and leisure activities for offenders using resources within the community of the participants.

2. To develop the goodwill and co-operation of the appropriate agencies within the community, and wherever possible use resources on a shared basis.

3. To enable offenders to participate in sport and leisure activities at their own level in a friendly and supportive environment so that the activities may be continued on completion of their programme.

4. To allow participants the opportunity to have a positive experience through the medium of sport and leisure activities, enabling them to develop the social skills which will help link them with appropriate agencies.

5. To help offenders become aware of educational/training and employment opportunities following the build-up of motivation, self-esteem and confidence through the activities.

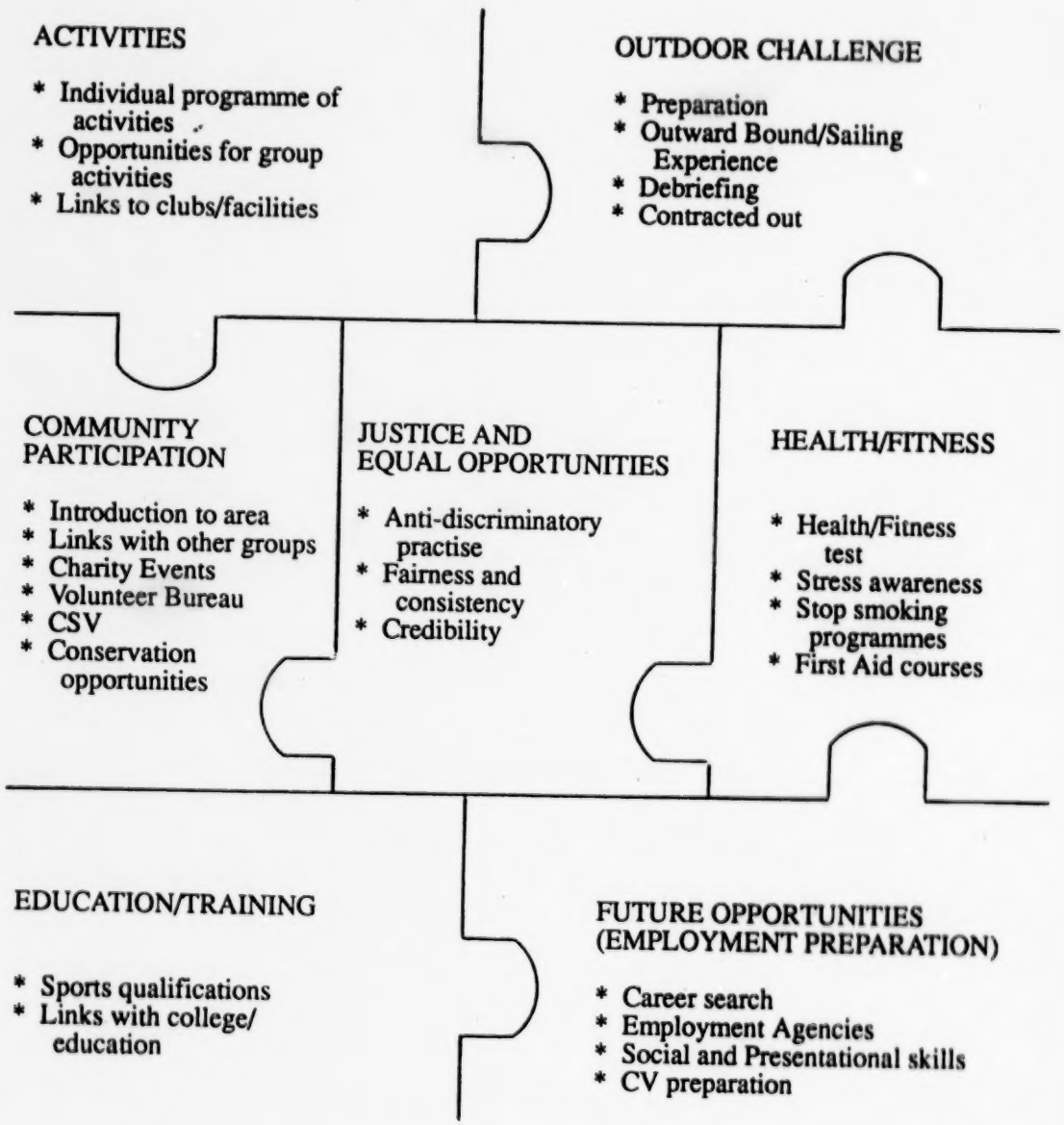
6. To contribute to crime reduction programmes including working with Hostels and Probation Centres.

How do we link into adventure activities - well, perhaps first an example of the problems of working with offenders can be summed up by a recent incident we had. The local Outward Bound Trust found they were not getting many offenders taking up places on Outward Bound. They contacted the Chief Probation Officer who called together Probation Officers to find people to go together on a one-off week's Outward Bound.

So they went back to their offices, worked through their cases, found people they thought appropriate. Dates were set and a meeting was held for those going a week beforehand. Of the 8 who were to go only 3 turned up. After rushing around they found 2 had reoffended, 1 had moved away, 1 had a part-time job and the other was no longer interested, so it ended up with getting a young man from a Probation Hostel to go with no real idea of what to expect.

Fig. 2

SPORTS COUNSELLING SCHEME



Following this disaster, I was then asked to join the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Outward Bound Association to ensure better understanding from both parties involved and we now regularly send individuals who have been through a Sports Counselling programme which has demonstrated their commitment.

New partnerships do not always run smoothly and wherever possible areas that can cause problems should always be sorted out as quickly as possible. The individuals who you are going to work with should also always be considered at the initial stages.

Individual needs to be considered by both partners

- The precise needs of priority groups must be considered
- Stereotyping of individuals must be avoided
- Appropriate awareness training for partners which explains the needs and aspirations of different individuals
- Consultation and dialogue with individuals affected must be the starting point. It is crucial to include them in programme planning.

You also need to make certain you have the agency workers on your side otherwise you end up with not enough referrals coming through.

What makes Probation Officers refer?

- Agency must fulfil needs that would otherwise be unmet
- More likely to be specialist services
- Good, clear, simple and precise information regarding service
- Personal knowledge of the work of the Agency and the individuals working for it
- A simple and speedy referral process
- Recommendation by colleagues
- Own experience of previous referrals and feedback.

The Sports Council researched and evaluated our scheme for 5 years and they produced lengthy reports on all aspects of our work doing activities with offenders and I won't go into any depth here on that, and in fact there is a workshop tomorrow on the West Yorkshire Probation Sports Counselling Scheme research evaluation. But the Sports Council found six major aspects why Probation Officers felt activities were important for the people they worked with. They were:

1. Self-esteem
2. Self-awareness
3. Confidence
4. Friendship
5. Achievement

and lastly to make individuals aware of the resources around them.

Finally, two examples of how interesting it can be to work with offenders. Three weeks ago we had a phone call from a local Rotary Club to say one of their members had run a marathon to raise money for a disadvantaged young person to take part in a sailing experience. The Sail Training Association had recommended us as they knew we could provide someone who was local and we normally would not have funds to send someone. We looked at individuals on our books and found someone who we thought would be appropriate and would benefit. The Rotary Club wanted him to go to their monthly lunch so they could meet him - that was on the Friday and he was due to sail on the following Monday. On Monday morning I got a phone call at a meeting to say that this young man had reoffended over the weekend and was locked up. If we couldn't find someone the money would be lost and I'm certain Rotary would have found that hard to understand. However, another young man who had finished his programme, walked into the office for a chat and we asked him if he was interested in sailing and did he want to go. Luckily he was a very flexible young man as within two hours he was on board the Sir Winston Churchill preparing to sail to France. The report on his return was most positive and he has been invited back to have a free voyage as a watch leader. On his return we were his first port of call to talk about his experience as he had no-one else to talk to, and he also wrote immediately to the Rotary Club to thank them.

Lastly, one of the case studies from the Sports Council report was on Stuart who was almost a self-referral because he was friendly with another client, but he had a long history of petty offences. However, in his Probation Officer's view he was not criminally minded. He was referred to gain some sense of achievement, otherwise missing from his life. He had no job, but was trying to support his wife and young child on benefits. His Probation Officer's words were: "I think the word "problem" was invented for this lad".

His main interest on the scheme was canoeing which he took very seriously. After six months he had obtained a 3-star award of which he was very proud, and joined a canoeing club. The Sports Leaders gave him an outlet to express his problems that didn't have the stigma of authority and he *knew* he'd achieved success on his own. His Probation Officer's view was that "His quality of life has improved. I don't believe he has reoffended since and his whole attitude is more mature."